

After 50 Weeks of Prayer, Is This Supreme Court Nominee God's Champion?

On Tuesday, President Donald Trump named Judge Neil Gorsuch as his Supreme Court nominee to replace Justice Antonin Scalia—a lion-hearted defender of the U.S. Constitution's original intent. The Senate Judiciary Committee will now begin its important confirmation hearings, followed by a vote of the full Senate.

It's vital that we all understand the weightiness of what's happening. This justice will sit on the court for perhaps four decades; it is no small decision.

As one who leads a ministry that has been standing and praying outside the Supreme Court for more than 12 years, there are many reasons I am encouraged by the announcement of this judge. I believe this is a storyline filled with divine promise and encouraging facts.

Why We Started to Pray for a Champion

On Feb. 13, 2016, I got off an airplane in Dallas only to hear the tragic news that Justice Scalia had unexpectedly passed away—in Texas, of all places. I was devastated. The Supreme Court was only weeks away from hearing a monumental abortion-related case out of Texas (Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt), a major prayer focus of Bound4LIFE for three years.

The following day, I was approached by two different leaders of national prayer ministries who had specific encouragements from the Lord for me. The first leader pointed their finger at me sternly and said, "Your job is to keep Scalia's seat open." I was stunned by those words, but at the same time they

resonated in my spirit.

Later in the afternoon, the second national leader called, asking, "Where are you?" After I answered, they told me to stay there until they arrived.

There at the table where we were eating lunch, this highly respected leader said to me: "God says, 'I have a champion that I have positioned all along, ready to go into this place.' So, the Lord says, 'Hold the fort for me, and hold the fort for my champion that I'm ready to bring up to the place they should be.'"

Exactly how does one hold open a seat on the United States Supreme Court? Some would suggest lobbying Senate leaders, while others would put emphasis on social media campaigns and writing op-eds. For me, I know these things happen through prayer and fasting.

At many points in the past year, it seemed impossible. Not since 1970 had the Senate held a seat open on the Supreme Court for a full year.

Yet that one phrase really struck me: there was a "champion" whom God had in mind to sit in that seat. Now that's a prayer we could pray relentlessly, regardless of the circumstances.

The person of faith will often look naïve to those with a worldly mindset. As the presidential campaign proceeded, candidates supported by many pro-life advocates began to drop out. When only two were left, many people didn't trust either one, though some evangelical leaders began to see a stark choice before us.

Then Donald Trump released a list of 21 potential nominees for the Supreme Court, which many Constitutional scholars praised. His list gave new fuel to our prayers.

In June 2016, that Texas case related to abortion clinic

safety regulations was not decided in favor of life; we were heartbroken by the loss. I wept as I stood there praying in front of the Supreme Court that day, surrounded by young pro-abortion activists singing loudly: "We are the champions!"

Yet we continued praying for God's "champion" to come to the court. Even when everyone was saying that Hillary Clinton was certain to win the election, we didn't give up on praying for it to come to pass—because we knew it was what the Lord wanted.

An Unexpected Election—and a Surprising Confirmation

One of the reasons no one predicted this past election's outcome was because so-called experts didn't realize how important the Supreme Court is to Americans, and specifically to Christians.

Seven in 10 voters said that Supreme Court appointments were an important factor in their vote, and those voters overwhelmingly chose to elect President Donald Trump.

During inauguration week, my team and I hosted a Native American friend from California who came to D.C. to pray. When he heard about our year-long prayers for the "champion," he felt led to look at the list of Supreme Court nominees which had been narrowed to three front-runners.

As a Native American, the meaning of names carries much weight for him; it was only natural that he noticed the significance of the meaning behind someone's name.

He was shocked when he saw that the name "Neil" means "champion." This fact really intrigued us. We began to wonder, "Is Neil Gorsuch the champion that God had in mind?" I laughed a little when I asked my team: "Were we praying for him by name all along and didn't even know it?!"

Today, we know President Trump has indeed chosen Neil Gorsuch

as his nominee. What do we know about this judge from the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in Colorado? Does he fit the mold carved out by our prayers for the empty seat?

Upholding the Constitution Like a Champion

Gorsuch is most widely known for ruling in the Hobby Lobby contraception case before it reached the Supreme Court in 2014. His controversial decision was upheld in a 5-4 vote.

He wrote in the case that those with “sincerely held religious beliefs” should not be forced to participate in something “their religion teaches them to be gravely wrong.”

In a similar fashion, Gorsuch sided with the Little Sisters of the Poor when their legal battle with the Obama administration reached the 10th Circuit in 2015. This case centered on whether these nuns, who serve the frail elderly nationwide, would be required to pay an annual fine of approximately \$70 million dollars to the government for refusing to cover contraception in their insurance plans.

Gorsuch joined the majority decision, which said in part: “All the plaintiffs in this case sincerely believe that they will be violating God’s law if they execute the documents required by the government. And the penalty for refusal to execute the documents may be in the millions of dollars. How can it be any clearer that the law substantially burdens the plaintiffs’ free exercise of religion?”

Again, the Supreme Court ultimately echoed his reasoning in their recent decision in favor of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Only months ago, in a decision released on October 28, 2016, Judge Gorsuch wrote a dissenting opinion in the case *Planned Parenthood Association of Utah v. Herbert*.

It concerns whether Utah Governor Gary Herbert acted lawfully

by cutting off taxpayer funds to Planned Parenthood following a video investigation by the Center for Medical Progress. Gorsuch rejected the majority opinion, which reinstated Planned Parenthood's public funding, and accurately represented Governor Herbert's pro-life appeal in his dissent.

Quoting Governor Herbert, Gorsuch wrote: "The defendants do not dispute that the governor said: 'We now have video where they're selling fetus body parts for money and it's an outrage and the people of Utah are outraged. I'm outraged. So for coloring outside the lines, Planned Parenthood forfeits some of their benefits.'"

Gorsuch concluded: "It is undisputed ... that the governor was free as a matter of law to suspend the funding in question."

Federal judges rarely write books on controversial topics, so it is significant that Gorsuch authored *The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia* in 2006—edited by Professor Robert George of Princeton University.

"Human life qualifies as a basic good," wrote Gorsuch in Chapter 9. "It follows that we can and should refrain from actions intended to do it harm." He further stated: "To act intentionally against life is to suggest that its value rests only on its transient instrumental usefulness for other ends."

To pass the rigorous Senate confirmation hearings, I recognize that Judge Gorsuch cannot explicitly state whatever his views are on the sanctity of human life. Yet, to many other pro-life advocates and me, the words in his book telegraph his principles in a way that is inescapable.

Seeing the Big Picture

The larger questions are about judicial philosophy, which I have posed to a few friends who happen to serve as judges. Currently seated on the Alabama Supreme Court, Justice Tom Parker (whom I cite with his permission) wrote to me following

our conversation:

Dr. Robert George was involved in getting Princeton University Press to publish Neil Gorsuch's pro-life book examining assisted suicide. In the Acknowledgments, Gorsuch thanked George and Dr. John Finnis for working with him through multiple drafts of the book.

Both men are recognized as leading Christian intellectuals: George for his work in ethics and religious liberty, and Finnis in legal philosophy. Gorsuch studied at Oxford with Finnis, where George has also produced noteworthy scholarship.

As pro-life advocates, these two men have taken legal philosophy back to the 'natural rights of man' school. This is the legal foundation of America, as stated in the Declaration of Independence: "All men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights ..."

God is the source of our rights—not social compact, not government, not a man-created philosophy. Now these great men who are re-laying the foundation of the legal system have embraced Gorsuch.

Without question, Gorsuch has the mental gravitas to follow in Scalia's shoes. The fact that Gorsuch turned to these men and has worked with them is a mighty indication of his legal orientation; this bodes extremely well for his career of service to America.

There will always be unknowns when it comes to Supreme Court nominees. Yet it's clear to me that Judge Gorsuch fits the mold of the champion we have prayed for.

Nearly one year ago, we never could've known a "champion" of Constitutional law would be appointed to the Supreme Court. Last fall, election polls considered that essentially

impossible. For us, a word from God gave us clarity in the confusion and a strong basis for faith.

We now turn to confirmation hearings in the Senate. Along with all Americans, I will be listening closely to what Judge Gorsuch has to say. And I hope you'll join us as we continue to pray for God's champion to sit in the empty seat. {eo}

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